

1825

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No. 19

1825

An Essay  
on  
Dysmenorrhœa.  
By  
William C. Warren  
of  
Virginia

2d Edition

(1842)

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## Dysmenorrhœa

It is the office of the uterus to elaborate and discharge at regular periods a peculiar fluid. When this discharge is partial, and attended with much pain and difficulty, it is termed Dysmenorrhœa.

Notwithstanding the importance of this disease with regard to the healthy economy of the female, medical writers have paid but little attention to it. Dr. Denman was the first that noticed it particularly; and to him, we are indebted for its history and true characters. Dr. Fothergill has spoken of it vaguely, and Cullen has merely given it a place in his first lines. Dr. Denman was the first who considered an organized substance as constituting a part of this disease; though he has offered no expla-

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nation of the formation of that substance. In every case of habitual painful menstruation, he thinks this membrane is expelled.

Of late, two interesting papers on this subject have been written by Drs Chapman and Dewees. Their opinions, always entitled to respect, are calculated to remove much of the obscurity with which it has hitherto been surrounded. They adopt the theory of secretion, which has generally been ascribed to the celebrated Hunter; and believe the *membrana decidua* exists in almost every case of obstinate and long continued Amenorrhoea. Dr B. has gone into a very ingenious detail of the fabrication of the membrane; he supposes the process of secretion is merely to divert the blood of the power of coagulating, from the fact, that coagulation does take place when there is uterine derangement, and that in health it is never the case.

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He therefore makes coagulation a test of the unhealthy action of the Uterus. When the functions of this viscus then are performed imperfectly, the Lymph does not undergo a modification, but is thrown into the cavity of the Uterus, possessing the power of separation and of coagulation. As the fluid is poured gradually into the Uterus, it has time to separate into its constituent parts. The red globules from their greater weight and density, will lean the unobscured coagulating lymph, and fall to the bottom of the Uterus and sooner or later be discharged; while the Lymph spreading itself over the internal surface of the Uterus, soon assumes the appearance of membrane, as is usual with it when in contact with living parts.

This membrane will be, to all intents and purposes, an extraneous substance to the Uterus, and will sooner or later urge it to contraction

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to those is aff; which contractions will be  
painful like those of labor: hence the pain  
in this kind of menstruation.

Whether this view is correct, is a matter of speculation. But, that the vessels of the uterus, which pour out the catamenia are the instruments by which the decidua is formed, there is no doubt. And it is equally true, that while they are engaged either in the formation or support of this new production, menstruation ceases.

### *Causes\_*

The remote causes of this disease, it would be difficult to assign. The most common, are colds applied during the evacuation of the menses; taking cold after abortion; and sometimes it has followed the consummation of marriages. This latter cause is difficult of explanation.

*Gympterus* -

This disease usually attacks those who are poor.

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disposed, or obnoxious to it, and commences with a slight  
menstruous discharge, which in a short time suddenly  
ceases, and the woman instantly experiences violent  
pains; described by her as forcing down and  
returning at longer or shorter intervals, till a  
membranous substance or small coagula are dis-  
charged; sometimes small and at other times large  
and resembling the cavity of the uterus in shape.  
After this substance is expelled, the woman enjoys  
ease, unless there be a fresh production to stimu-  
late another effort in the uterus for its expulsion.  
Several days are sometimes spent before these ef-  
forts cease and at other times only a few hours are  
required. The degree of pain is not in propor-  
tion to the quantity of membrane, as sometimes  
a small portion is discharged after a great  
deal of suffering, and a large portion may be thrown  
off without producing as much uneasiness. Besides the  
intermittent pains, there is generally a discharging red.

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ing in the back and hips, which almost invariably announces the approach of the period. In some instances this continues for several days. The sufferings at the menstrual period are sometimes so severe, that they resemble in intensity the pains of labor or abortion.

There appear to be two distinct states of this affection — one where the mammae sympathize with the uterus and become tumid and sometimes extremely painful; the other where no such affection is induced. In the management of these two conditions, the one accompanied with pain is thought least deficient.

#### Treatment

Assuming it as a principle, that menstruation is a secretory process, and that this disease depends upon a perversion of the healthy action of the uterus, our remedies must be first directed to the relief of pain, and secondly, to restore

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bathly action. the first of these indications is not  
 of opium and opium in the form of Dover's powder;  
 of camphor and opium, the warm bath, fomenta-  
 tions to the region of the uterus; and if the pa-  
 tient's sufferings are very intense, 100 drops of lau-  
 sanum may be injected into the rectum. When  
 there is inflammatory diathesis, evacuation is a  
 very essential and should never be omitted. Of op-  
 ium and camphor, Dr. Chalmers speaks with  
 much confidence, which is the result of his own  
 practice. Administered in the proportion of two  
 grains of the first article, to ten of the latter  
 has seldom failed in his hands. Dr. Dewees recommends  
 the following formula.

R<sup>o</sup> Gum Camphor ʒj

Sp. Vin. Rect. q. S. f. pulv. M

Sac. Alba q. S. f. m. ext. ʒj

q. S. Aqua Cinnamon ʒj

As soon as pain is experienced, one half of

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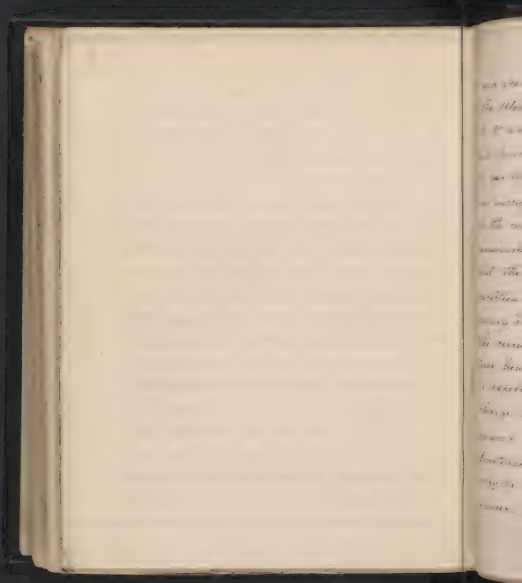
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This draught is to be given; and if not relieved in  
 an hour or two, the residue should be exhibited.  
 In all cases, this quantity is not sufficient to  
 subdue pain, and the mixture should be repeated;  
 or the same quantity of campher may be finely  
 powdered and given in ten grain doses every hour,  
 until relief is procured. Should the stomach be so  
 deranged, as to bear nothing upon it, and this  
 sometimes is the case, thirty or forty grains of  
 campher, ought to be rubbed down with a few  
 drops of the spirits of wine to a very fine  
 powder, ℞ of Laudanum, and ℞ij of thin starch  
 or flaxseed tea, and used as an injection.  
 If this be too suddenly discharged, it may  
 be repeated. The Ergot from its affinity to  
 the uterus, would seem to afford us here an in-  
 valuable remedy, for besides the specific effects  
 exerted by it on that organ, its action is almost  
 instantaneous but still one operation is not met

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by it in this disease. Its efficacy is only confined  
to those cases where the decided crisis, and  
though cures have been effected with it, and  
respectable Authorities think its claims to our  
notice very slender.

The remedies next presenting themselves are  
those used during the interval of the attacks, to  
produce such a change, as will prevent a return,  
by doing away that state of the uterus on which  
this disease depends, and establishing a new  
action. I will first mention the *Polygaia Tonga*  
as demanding our attention, in those cases when  
the interruption depends on a membrane.  
All who are familiar with the effects of  
this medicine upon the system, must have  
perceived how actively it promotes the  
various secretory discharges. It would seem  
then peculiarly adapted to Dysmenorrhœa, as  
it would appear obvious, that both a forcible



and specific impression should be made on the uterus, to excite it to a secretory effort. To Dr. Naults-horne is due the credit of introducing this practice. The Seneka Dr. Chapman immediately gave it a fair and extensive trial, and from his success, is warranted in recommending it as one of the most active Emmenagogues. It may be administered either in powder or decoction, but the latter mode is preferred. Of the decoction, about four ounces should be given during the day, or more or less according to the circumstances of the case. At the time however when the menstrual effort is expected to be made, and till the discharge is induced, the dose should be increased as far as the stomach will bear. Sometimes as much as two ounces every hour may be taken. Should the medicine excite nausea, combine with it orange peel, cinnamon

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In the time between the menstrual periods, the medicine should be laid aside for a week or two, as without these intermissions, if it does not lose its power, it becomes nauseous and disgusting to the patient. While under such a course, the system should always be attended to, equally obviating excessive excitement or debility by the use of appropriate remedies.

In the exhibition of remedies to prevent a recurrence of pain, the Volatile Tincture of Guaiacum is recommended with a confidence that could <sup>scarcely</sup> ~~possibly~~ be derived from success, by Dr Dewar. Whilst on the other hand, Dr James, whose extensive practice affords him many opportunities of witnessing its effects, has seen no advantage from its use. The mode of using it is, a teaspoonful every morning, noon, and evening, in a wine glassful of sweetened milk, or when not forbidden by some peculiarity or circumstance, as

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much white wine, as Sherry, Turaiffe or Madeira. The dose must be gradually increased in those cases where a perspiration beyond four or five weeks becomes necessary. It is necessary sometimes to continue the use of it several months. If this medicine should disturb the bowels too much, a few drops of Laudanum must be added to each dose; but if on the contrary they should not be sufficiently opened, the addition of a little resin of Jalap or powdered Rhubarb will be an improvement.

Dr B's formula. ℞ Pulv Gum Guaiacum ʒiv  
 Carb. Soda. ul & cap. ʒij  
 Pulv Pimento — ʒj  
 Alcohol Sulfur (6j)

digest for a few days, and add the powdered  
 Shell of Sal. Ammoniac pro. recta in the  
 proportion of a drachm or two to every pint of wine.

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of tincture; or a larger or smaller quantity  
equally to circumstances. Greater advantage  
is to be expected, when the first mens-  
trual period after commencing the use of it  
is more than usually severe. This there-  
fore may be considered a favorable sign.

The Extract of cicuta, the Tincture of Cae-  
teaudes, and the Madder root, have all  
been used successfully in this disease.

The Black Hellebore was long since introduced  
as an emmenagogue by Mead, and recom-  
mended by him in the strongest terms. Its  
use was suspended by the opinion of Cullen,  
who pronounced it to be a false and uncer-  
tain remedy; but is again revived, and is thought  
to have many just pretensions to the reputation  
it formerly possessed. In painful menstruation,  
attended with torpor and constipation of the  
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susceptibility in the uterus, it is especially useful  
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is a remedy from which we may expect  
advantage when all others have failed; I will  
mention mercury. It is a fact well known,  
that no medicine in the Materia Medica  
has such a specific effect on the secretories;  
and whenever those organs become deranged,  
to that medicine we look for correction;  
therefore in the most obstinate cases of this  
disease, a moderate salivation kept up for  
several weeks, will often produce the happiest  
effects. A case came under my observation, of  
a young Lady aged 16. who had her menses suddenly  
checked by alarm during the discharge. At  
each successive period for several months, the flow  
was small, and accompanied with much suffering;  
she then became subject to the most violent  
paroxysms of Hysteria. After trying a variety of

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remedies without success, her Physician determined to resort to mercury, as soon as syphilis was excited there was evident change in her mind and feelings, and since that time, the uterus has performed its functions with perfect regularity, and the lady is entirely restored to health. It was impossible to ascertain whether any membrane was expelled, as the clots could not be examined, and the accounts of the attendants unsatisfactory.

Why should not the Nitro Muriatic Acid have an efficient remedy in this disease? As a promoter of secretions it is thought by many to be only inferior to mercury, and is used not only as an auxiliary to that metal in several diseases, but is also frequently substituted for it. Dr Scott who first used the acid, applied it very extensively to practice; he says "It appears in a peculiar manner to affect the glands and alter their secretions."

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From the analogy then between this and many of the other medicines used in Dysmenorrhœa, it is fair to infer its utility. Used either internally or as a bath, the same effects are produced.

In this disease attention should always be paid to the bowels, using laxatives if they are costive. In an external application blisters applied to the back and thighs will be found highly adontaneous, by inviting a determination to the uterine vessels.

The married and single woman are alike liable to this disease, and whilst it continues they are anxious and unhappy; and what renders these cases still more interesting is the influence exerted on the generative power. Unless this wrong action is changed, the woman will rarely become a mother.

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